

UPDATES FROM AN ARGENTINIAN ANTIFASCIST

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We were able to get an interview with Nicholas of Buenos Aires, Argentina to catch up on what's been happening since the presidential election of libertarian capitalist Javier Milei. Milei's presidential campaign was highlighted by his claims to subvert the status quo of Peronism – a socially liberal form of democracy with decades of complicated contexts in the 20th century. He's claimed to be an “anarcho-capitalist,” although his policies since election have been nothing short of classic neoliberalism: cuts to social welfare, hamstringing of labor union's rights to strike and picket, and doing away with common regulations of capital.

While folks in the USA have sought to understand Milei by comparing him to former U.S. President Trump, Nicholas outlines how this comparison falls short. We also talk about the role of organized anti-fascists in expecting continued clashes with the police, the social space & boxing gym La Cultura Del Barrio, and how the call for a general strike by mainstream labor unions in Argentina largely fell flat.

NACLA article on Milei: <https://nacla.org/argentina-shock-therapy-resistance-and-role-left>

LCDB on:

instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/laculturadelbarrio.official/>

facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/lacultura.delbarrio/>

LCDB Rolling Stone article (in spanish): <https://es.rollingstone.com/la-cultura-del-barrio-documental-arg/>

Search for this interview title at **<https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org/>** to find links to further resources on this topic, featured music, the audio version, and files for printing copies of this episode.

TFSR: First up, if you could you introduce yourself and some of the projects you work on in Buenos Aires?

Nicolás: My name is Nicolas. I'm from the south-east city of the country. I have been living in Buenos Aires since 2009, and I'm a part of Acción Antifascista Buenos Aires.

TFSR: I'd be excited to talk about LCDB, La Cultura del Barrio, but maybe we can talk about that later in the interview as well. Let's jump in.

For English-speaking American audiences who maybe don't follow Argentine politics very closely, Milei was just recently elected. Most of what I feel has been talked about in US media is that he's kind of the Argentina version of our Donald Trump. I'm curious, who is Milei? How did he become popular enough to win the presidential election? What was his mass appeal?

Nicolás: Milei is a very new phenomenon. He is not like Trump. Trump is more patriotic, and Milei appeals to the "freedom of speech" idea. But in fact, he's trying to apply not a liberal policy but an illiberal policy. He has a liberal discourse, but he is trying to apply all the policies by decrees. For example, last month, the government tried to apply a "Necessity and Urgency Decree" to apply over 600 laws without discussing it in Congress. It includes the privatization of football clubs, giving him the right to apply laws without Congressional oversight for two years, and managing the economics and social policies without Congress. Obviously, the left-wing parties, or the social-democratic parties, say "Stop, we can't go with that." A lot of people who voted for him also noted that that's not what we will do: that "you're talking about liberty, freedom, free market, taking out the benefits from the poorest people," but he didn't do any of that. But he moved the money from the poorest classes to the richest. The subsidies, when the government could give money to a private company, he started with that with very big companies like Mercado Libre. It's like the Amazon of Argentina. Reducing taxes for big companies, not just modest companies.

About the protests, the demonstrations: the first one, the biggest one was three weeks ago, organized by the biggest syndicalist union, Confederación General del Trabajo. It united 20-30 [unions], but they're managed

by three very rich people. Those three have occupied top positions in the union for up to 20, 30, 40 years. They have a lot of power. They organized the demonstration, it was half a million people around the country, but it was one day for 2-3 hours, and that's all. When Congress tried to apply the DNU, the new decree, a lot of people went out to the streets, and there was some fight against the police or against even the same organizations. But then the government didn't pass the decree, because a lot of people in the Congress that promised to the government that they would vote for the bill ended up refusing to do it at the last moment. The government says "Well, we will have a vote again in a month, two months." We are waiting to see what's going to happen.

TFSR: You talked about how there's a big feeling among Argentine voters who are saying, "This is not why we voted for you. You're doing things that we didn't think that you would do." Do you have an idea or a feeling of why people voted for Milei? Why was he popular?

Nicolás: For example, he was popular because of social media. He is basically been growing for the last five years on social media, mostly among younger people. There was another candidate from the Economics Ministry. You have to know that that ministry leads the government with 180% inflation. So the people didn't want to vote for that. If we're voting for a better candidate for our government, we can't vote for a government that leaves you with nothing for your salary.

Also, Milei was talking about in the campaign to people who took to the streets to demonstrate. Here in Buenos Aires, it's a daily thing. Every day you have pickets and blockades when people block the street, so you can go on and you have to see the demonstration. A lot of workers are tired of that because they have to go to work and they can't go because they can't go along the street, or they see a lot of people that don't work but have some benefits from the state. A lot of people don't like that. And Milei is used to screaming and cursing, while the left-wing parties are very politically correct. Most of the workers don't want to be politically correct. They want things done. He used that to win a lot of people, the poorest people, saying, "Well, if the politicians don't work, we don't pay them. If the politicians have a lot of money, we will reduce their salaries." They talk a lot about the establishment, "la casta" (the caste), about how the previous governments had a

lot of people working in the different state agencies, ministries, etc. And a lot of people say, like, “Well, I’m paying taxes to pay a lot of politicians or people who don’t even work.” That was the most influential part of Milei’s discourse.

Also, he claimed to be a messiah, the guy who came to Argentina to save the country. He said he talked about it with his dead dog. Also, he cloned his dead dog and created four or five more dogs with the same name. He said that his dog, Conan, saved him and that he wanted to save Argentina. The people didn’t even say, “Well, you’re fucking crazy! You’re talking with your dog.” People were like “Oh, he’s so sweet. He talks with his dead dog.” But nowadays, a lot of people who voted for him are saying, “Well, we have to give him some time to govern, to apply the policies. We will see in a year.” But people now can’t even pay for public transport. The prices grew by 100-150%, from \$1 to \$3 per ticket. So people are saying, “Not only are you not taking money from the politicians or the big companies, but also you are raising the price of the tickets.” So he’s a very weird candidate, a weird person. He is a freak. Last month he went on a date with a famous actress in a theater and kissed her in front of the cameras. People thought it was gross: “You’re a president. You have to really act more serious.” I understand why he won the election, but not why people love him.

TF SR: It sounds like we can’t really characterize or describe Milei’s supporters as fascists or members of the far-right?

Nicolás: No, very far from them.

TF SR: Yeah. It seems he has a very mass appeal and that mass appeal came from people being upset with the status quo of Peronism. Is that true?

Nicolás: Exactly. Even the largest fascist organizations and certain groups, now they are not even fascist, they are transforming into alt-right or new nationalism, but not fascism. For example, a lot of fascist organizations don’t like him because he’s pro-Israel. Also, he’s talking with the IMF to take a new loan to pay debts. So his electorate are not fascists, they are people who are upset with Peronism, as you said, and looking for a new kind of government, a new discourse, and even another discussion in the streets about

politics. Because feminism, progressivism, and collectivism were a very big part of the agenda of the last government and a lot of people didn't like it either. But because there was a lot of money from the state going to these organizations when people have salaries from \$10 to \$100 per month, people say, "Well, why do we have to support the government which gives a lot of money to X organization and not to us?" That was a very big part of why he won. People were upset with that kind of politics.

TFSR: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. It sounds like the alt-right, the fascism scene is also displeased with Milei, but for different reasons. Because, as you were saying, his support for Israel. Far-right, have they shifted their style or ideology in response to Milei? Are they just ignoring him? How has Millie's presidency impacted the far-right?

Nicolás: There are two sides. One side supports him because they want money, I think. The other side is between ignoring him and being against some policies but supporting others. In Argentina, the far-right is a large part of the population. Unlike in the '80s and '70s, when the far-right was much bigger than now. Nowadays, they transformed into right-wing social democrats.

But one of the most notorious discourses of Milei was saying that the Pope is a representative of the demon in the earth. Then he said sorry to the Pope, and he was in the Vatican a week ago with the Pope. Before that, he was in Israel. Argentina has a big Jewish population. Jewish organizations here have a lot of power because there are a lot of Jews, and he attracted them. He said if they faced any attack, he would support them. Now he says he is a Jew, that he's in the process of transformation to be a Jew. But when he went to the Vatican, he said, "No, I am a Catholic. I have my convictions, but if you don't like it, I have another..." He goes from A to Z in a second.

TFSR: Okay. Let's shift gears a little bit. I want to ask you, how are social movements responding to Milei? What has been the role of anti-fascists in the last couple of months in responding to his presidency and what he's managed to get through Congress?

Nicolás: Well, nowadays, we have an organization with anti-fascist orientation. We will obviously participate in all manifestations and demonstrations.

We also are making political formations about classism, about anti-fascism, about self-defense. We're also training for combat. But other social movements and organizations are doing a lot of stuff, a lot of meetings, and debates, just to be prepared for the worst. If they approve the laws, we have to go out in the streets and make a mess. It's gonna be messy.

But also, there are a lot of organizations that can't even work without the money of the state. There were a lot of parties or social organizations that distributed the money that the state gives to them. Now, when the state doesn't give them more money, they can't organize people. People say "There is no money, there's nothing." That's a big problem. As you can see, 2-3 years ago, demonstrations and manifestations with 5,000 people, and if you count them, 300 wouldn't even know why they were there. Other people would come to the manifestation because they're part of the organization that promises them money. That's a problem for a lot of organizations. Something had to happen because those organizations are only managing poverty. They are not giving benefits or not giving work, nothing. Just having a meeting with the Social Ministry, they say, "Well, we'll give you 500 coupons, 500 jobs, or money," and then they skim a third of that, and the rest of the money goes to people.

TFSR: It seems these other organizations are maybe not taking advantage of this moment to increase political education of what they're doing. Maybe people are tagging along just because there's a crowd. Is that what you are saying?

Nicolás: Yes, exactly.

TFSR: I wanted to ask you about La Cultura del Barrio, LCDB. You said anti-fascists are training. I've been in the space, I know a little bit, but I don't think that most anti-fascists in the USA know about LCDB. Why don't you talk a little bit about what is LCDB? What are the boxing classes you guys are doing in the gym and out in the barrio? What's the importance of LCDB in this new state of anti-labor reform?

Nicolás: Okay. LCDB is an anti-fascist club. We have a big gym where we train boxing and Muay Thai. We have been working since 2011. As a space,

we used to have many meetings, trainings, screenings, discussions, and gigs. We also use the space to help people get to know our organization, as anti-fascists. We also train combat sports to be prepared for clashes with police or fascists. But also we have classes on Marxism and anarchism, to not be just muscles and to not be only brain. We have to be a mix of all that.

In Buenos Aires, we are very well-known, because we have our documentary online that explains what we are and what we want. We also coordinate with a lot of organizations to teach them about self-defense, or organizations invite us to be the self-defense at some manifestations and demonstrations. We have relationships with clubs from different countries, but as an anti-fascist club and organization, we try to be involved in a lot of things.

For example, we have a project in which we give people boxing classes in poor neighborhoods in the southern part of the province. The south of Buenos Aires is a very poor place, and we train residents in boxing, we talk about politics, we try to be involved with the families. Also trying to work with different kinds of artistic manifestations. If they are against the new laws about job flexibility, etc, we know that the only way we can combat that is in the streets and organize with other organizations in the streets. But not only in the manifestation, because we have to talk with general people about politics, about how the new laws are gonna make us poorer than we are now. If you are a football supporter, you're gonna lose your club. It's gonna be a private company. Nowadays, it doesn't happen in Argentina, the football clubs are managed by their supporters and associates. And there's a lot of stuff like that with the new mega law.

TFSR: Your response led me to a related question. Has there been reactionary violence towards the manifestations against Milei from his supporters?

Nicolás: Not yet. We think that's going to happen eventually. For example, at the last manifestation, a lot of Milei supporters were saying, "We're gonna go to the street and we're going to fight the leftists." Not a single person appeared. Most of Milei's supporters are social media supporters. They are trolls. They will say, "I will kill you if I see you in the street." But you can't see them in the street because they are not in the street. Maybe it's gonna happen if the left-wing parties or organizations become more combative.

Nowadays, they're also mostly on social media, and most of the anti-Milei discourse is performances in TikTok. It's bad. You are not gonna stop a law by singing on TikTok. Instead of talking about the bad things about Milei, they say "Milei is gonna do that," and the people say, "Yeah, I want him to do that." Instead of saying, "You're going to be poorer than now. Your salary will be worse," they are talking about other topics, but not important things. Not the economic things that are most important because it's gonna affect all the people, not only the left, socialists, anarchists, but all of us as a class, as a working class. But the left parties here are not classist anymore. They talk about everything but not class. They're talking about the forest fires in Australia. They were against a petrol oil company while we have no jobs. Mines give a lot of people their job and money, and they say, "We have to close that company, but we can't support the people who lose their jobs." It's incompatible. If it closes, people will be fired. That's how it works.

TFSR: It sounds like what you're saying is that the left has lost the class analysis, and that that's driving some of the working-class people to feel alienated from the left.

Nicolás: Yeah, they are more about "identity politics." They are talking about that.

TFSR: I saw on social media that there was a bomb threat to LCDB during the strike. Did I read that correctly?

Nicolás: Yeah, they called the police and reported a bomb in the club the same day as our anti-fascist meeting there. We think it was done by a little kid calling the police, but the police came to the door, and the guys called a lawyer. They said we had to open the door. They entered with a bomb squad, looked around with a flashlight, found nothing, and they left.

TFSR: My last question for you. This will be niche because the nature of how football [soccer] is run in Argentina is very different than how it's run in the United States. For example, football in the United States, all of the clubs are owned by big corporations, big CEOs with a lot of money, whereas traditionally in Argentina, as you said, the clubs are financially owned by the associates. It's like the member-

ships of the clubs, the people who fill the stadiums and the terraces, they have ownership of the club in Argentina. How has Milei tried to change that? Because I understand this is very big in Argentina, but I don't think most people in the USA will understand this.

Nicolás: The big law, DNU, has a section that would allow big companies to buy a football team. But also all other clubs, volleyball, basketball, handball, a lot of sports. Because the clubs here are like part of society. You grow in your club. You go as a kid, do a sport, meet your friends, you have dinner there or a dance in the club. It's a part of your life. With the new law, they will allow big companies to buy teams. Lots of people are saying, "No, we are the owners of our club, our colors, our name." The biggest team that joined the demonstrations, Boca Juniors, is the one best and biggest team in Argentina. They were the first who said "no, it can't happen." Because they have an identity. La Boca is their neighborhood. When you're walking in the streets, it's all painted on the club colors, blue and yellow.

People feel their club is like a friend. You stay with the club when it's bad and when it's good. Nowadays, a lot of clubs have financial problems. That's a big problem here because they try to buy a player or have corrupt management who steal money or a lot of stuff like that, but no one will allow them to sell their club. It's a part of your life and not in the way that you pay to go to a gym to do some sport and then go to your house and you're not involved. The people here are involved, making the banners, etc. Some clubs have a human rights agenda. They talk about the supporters who died or disappeared in the last dictatorship, and they make memorials and they recognize the families. They do dances and a lot of stuff to finance the people who can't pay for education or wherever.

They use their organizations... The big clubs here, like River or Boca, they have general schools. The people who train in the club, mostly in the football teams, can study there and train there because there are a lot of people that come from different states to play in Boca Juniors or River on Independiente, and they are allowed to sleep and to live there. They have pensions. But if they are privatized, if they give the clubs to the big corporations, it will be a problem because all of that will disappear because it's not profitable. You can't earn money for the social or human rights project in your club [if that happens]. If Red Bull buys Boca, it will be called Red Bull Boca.

It's like they're killing you. You can't change the name of my club because all of the essence of the club is the name and colors and the neighborhood. And maybe they would move the stadium from La Boca to Porto Madero because you have more profits if you move the stadium. It's gonna kill the football. The little part of the small football clubs that we have in Argentina, they will kill that.

TFSR: So football in Argentina is very much a part of people's everyday lives in society. It's not like he's just opening up the finances for a sports team.

Nicolás: Football here is like a religion. If you ask people in the street, many will say that they are a friend, for example, but they are fanatics of a football team, and they live for the football team. They have tattoos, and they name their children to relate to the football team, after a player or whatever. And our greatest is Maradona. All the people that support football have to think "what would Maradona do" in this situation? Maradona would say "Go fuck yourself. You did nothing for the people."

T: Okay, Nico. That's all the questions I have. This has been really excellent. Thank you so much. Is there anything else you want to touch on before I close out the interview?

Nicolás: Great. If you need anything else, sorry for my bad English, but I have to practice.

TFSR: No, this was great. I really appreciate it. Thank you so much. Great to see you. I'll talk to you soon.

Nicolás: Bye-bye.

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